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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature and research that identify efforts on behalf of the Chicano community to effect change. Major emphasis is on change that deals with education of Chicano youth. The review of literature and research indicates 3 distinct divisions in organizational activity. Prior to 1940, Chicano organizations were of a passive form. From 1940 to 1960, organizations took positive steps, but with patience and restraint. During the 1960's, organizations took a more militant approach to solving problems through community action. The paper points up a need to gather and compile that which is written on Chicano community action efforts, a need to make literature and research available to scholar and layman alike, a need to sponsor and/or engage in needed research projects, and a need for funds to implement suitable programs. (JH)

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CHICANO COMMUNITY ACTION EFFORTS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL AND THEIR EFFECTS ON PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL CHANGE FOR MEXICAN-AMERICANS

A Research Paper

By

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For

Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory
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I

In an American democratic society a major base for change has been the role of community action upon all levels of public and private institutions. Organized efforts on behalf of a cause predominate throughout American history. It will be the purpose of this paper to review the literature and research that identify efforts on behalf of the Chicano community to effect change. Major emphasis will be on change that deals with education of Chicano youth. The results of this study will determine implications and possible direction for the future.

II

A review of the literature and research in the field, indicates three rather distinct periods. During the first period to about 1940 the purposes of organizations were of a passive form. The second period from about 1940 to 1960 showed positive steps being taken with patience and restraint. Lastly, the 1960's saw a more militant approach to solving problems through community action.

Literature and research on community action prior to 1940, indicating passiveness, took the form of organizing for purposes of insurance or for social or recreational needs. (B:7) Gamio made a study of the various organizations that flourished and named a few of the most important ones: 1) Honorary Commissions (Comisiones Honoríficas). This group was usually composed of the most respected persons and headed by the Mexican consul. Their object was mutual aid and protection and organizing patriotic celebrations (fiestas patrioticas). 2) Blue Cross (La Cruz Azul), this was an organization very similar to the Honorary Commissions and usually fulfilled the same tasks. The activities of this group diminished by the late 1920's. 3) The Spanish-American Alliance (Alianza Hispano-Americano), this organization was founded by the Mexicans in Tucson. Its purpose was mainly to be a mutual aid, paternal society, with an insurance feature built in its structure. 4) Woodmen of the World (Los Leñadores del Mundo), these groups are affiliates of the American society of the same name.

In his book Gamio lists several pages of organizations that existed

throughout the United States, chiefly in the Southwest. (B:7) Humphrey, in his study on Detroit's Mexican colony, surveyed the organizational structures that existed in the 1920's. (P:13) He frequently alludes to the difficulties in attempting to get concerted action. The one committee through which all the groups could cooperate was the Comite Patriotico Mejicano. This was organized each year to organize the patriotic fiestas for May 5 (cinco de mayo) and September 16 (diez y seis de septiembre). Originally it was headed by the Mexican consul, but internal friction caused him to dissolve the group. The result was that many groups took it over after that, and usually for their own self interests. Disunity and lack of leadership in the Detroit Mexican colony was traced by Humphrey to include differences in wealth and social position, personal animosities, and a generation gap between the Mexican parent and the first generation Mexican-American. (P:13)

Watson and Samora researched a small community in Colorado and came to the conclusion that a lack of leadership might be attributed to the pre-Anglo Spanish culture. The Patron-peon relationship teaches to discourage leadership among the people. (P:29). They also added that knowledge of the English language and of American social and political systems were essential to compete in an Anglo society. (P:29)

Bloom attempts to summarize the role of the Mexican immigrant in the United States. His study reveals: 1) isolation of the Mexican immigrant into a barrio-type living, 2) then the emergence of an integrated ethnic community, 3) and finally "the reduction in the isolation of the Mexican-American population and the progressive liquidation of the ethnic enclaves." (P:2) His first point seems to encompass the period to approximately 1940. His view of the organizations of the pre-1940's is reenforced by Paul S. Taylor.

Bloom quotes him as writing,"Sociedades and mutualistas represent the only continuous organized life among the Mexicans in which the initiative comes only from the Mexicans themselves. In this respect their importance transcends the benefits which they extend to the members in case of illness." (P:2)

The period prior to 1940 has thus far been revealed as passive from the stand point of community action. There are many who take issue with this conclusion.

Dr. George Sanchez feels that New Mexico's Hispanos were ready to participate in the Anglo-American world after World War I. (B:10) He puts the Hispanos at least twenty-five years ahead of other Spanish-speaking peoples in the Southwest. Dr. Sanchez points to New Mexico's first Hispano in Congress, Donisio Dennis Chavez, who later became a United States senator and served in this capacity until his death in 1962. (B:10)

Gamio supports Dr. Sanchez. He feels that of all the Americans of Mexican origin, the New Mexican groups "are a case apart" even though they have "marked Mexican characteristics." (B:7) He feels that because of their number and "in spite of the racial prejudice against them, they have been able to achieve and maintain a position--economically, ulturally, and socially--better than that of their brothers in the other states." (B:7)

Thus, it appears that community effort was limited to organizing for the patriotic fiestas, insurance, or for social and recreational purposes. It seems that although New Mexico Hispanos did not follow this pattern, available research does not reveal any specific development. It suggests that further research is needed on the unique evolvement of community-

oriented efforts on their behalf to effect change. It should also be noted that other exceptions to this passiveness can be found. One notable one was the effort of the Mexican field worker, who united to form a union, CUOM (Confederacion de Uniones Obreros Mexicanos). (B:13) In 1928 and 1930 the union called strikes in Imperial Valley. The first failed when "wholesale arrests and deportations" crippled the strikers' efforts. The second succeeded, but only temporarily. The growers retaliated with over 103 arrests, deportations and "tear gas, guns, shells, and bombs." (B:13)

From about 1940 to 1960 a change became evident. In the 1940's McWilliams predicted that the "impact of the first articulate generation" was to be far-reaching. He could envision that "Mexican-Americans will be found in all walks of life--in the arts, the professions, in the colleges and universities--and in significant numbers." (B:12)

An explanation as to what ushered in a new change is set forth by Paul M. Sheldon. He writes: (B:18) "For the Mexican-American in uniform, however, the World War II years brought experiences very different from those of his younger brother at home. The practice was for all military units, especially in the Army, to be composed of men from diverse backgrounds and from all parts of the country. The soldier with a Spanish surname met with none of the prejudice against which he had had to contend in his home neighborhood. Congressional Medals of Honor and other awards for valor were presented to proportionately more Mexican-Americans than to members of any other ethnic group."

"The returning postwar veteran was a new type of citizen for East Los

Angeles. He tended to be self-confident and interested in community activities. Thousands of these veterans took advantage of the various educational bills to complete their high school and college educations. They bought homes; they started independent businesses; they entered the professions. They placed a high value on education for themselves, their younger brothers, and for their children. It is hard to estimate--perhaps harder to overestimate--their influence in the changing picture of East Los Angeles since World War II, especially during the past decade."

The period was typified by the emergence of Chicano national organizations organized for the betterment of the Chicano. These organizations were formed in local chapters throughout the Southwest. This is not taking into consideration the numerous local organizations. A sampling taken of two groups in Los Angeles by the Laboratory of Urban Culture revealed that among the working-class Chicanos only 13.7 per cent belonged to any formally organized group. A second sampling was taken from the middle and upper-middle class group who were active members of leading local Mexican-American organizations. It was revealed that the latter group belonged not just to one of these active groups, but to many. "What developed was the picture of a relatively small number of persons who swelled the membership lists of many organizations." (B:18)

Of the many national organizations dedicated to the betterment of the Chicano, probably the oldest is LULAC (League of United Latin-American Citizens). It might be noted that this was founded just after World War I. It first appeared in New Mexico and later in Texas, Arizona and California. (B:10)

The American GI Forum was founded after World War II and enjoyed a rapid increase in membership that led to a national body. However, lately, its

membership has steadily declined. (B:18) Their motto is "Education is our freedom and freedom should be everybody's business."

MAPA Chapters were organized in the latter half of the 1950's in California and played a role in the state-wide democratic landslide of 1958. It's slogan is "Opportunity for all through MAPA." (B:18) In Texas there is a similar organization called PASSO (Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations)

Another group that has played a priminent role in the furtherance of La Causa (The Cause) is CSO (Community Service Organization). Concentrating its efforts in California, it has been the training ground for many Chicano leaders, most notable of which is Cesar Chavez. (B:5)

During the 1950's, these organizations, together with numerous active local groups, were able to effect many changes. Most of these were through the use of "Anglo methods" to achieve their ends. These included lawsuits aimed at using the courts to obtain equal opportunity. The courts have been used to include Chicanos on jurier. School districts were taken to court and charged with discrimination. Voter registration campaigns and political rallies were employed. (B:18) The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and Local Fair Employment Practices agencies have been utilized against discrimination in employment. These organizations have also rallied the Chicano community behind them in their fight for La Causa.

In summary, in the 1950's there was an emergence of many local and national organizations that used the tools of the system to gain their ends.

The 1960's were marked with an impatience that was typified by the non-

violent methods of Cesar Chavez (P:23) and the violence surrounding Tijerina. (P:6)

Cesar Chavez emerged as a produce of CSO inservice training. His ability to unify the Chicano behind his cause and La Causa has been the secret of his success as a leader. (B:5) He has made Chicanos identify with the grape boycott to the degree that several large growers were forced to capitulate. His charisma has gained adherents to the boycott among other fellow Americans as well as many others in foreign countries. (B:5)

Crystal City is also a landmark in community effort. Here the "Mexicanos outnumbered the Anglo by four to one." "Partly from apathy, partly because of the $1.75 poll tax, few Mexicans voted on election day, three hundred voters, mostly Anglos turned out." (P:19) In winning a political victory in Crystal City, the Chicanos used a three-fold attack by using: 1) PASSO (Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations)- "twice as many Mexicans as Anglos (1,139 to 532) had paid poll tax to vote." (P:19), 2) Teamsters- a leader Robert Sanchez of PASSO remarked that "they have no association with the teamsters, but our needs are so great that we will make a deal with the devil." (P:19), 3) Militancy- these Chicanos called "the other Texans--the last angry Americans." (P:14) were able to create political history by replacing traidtional spokesmen "by young leaders who drew their authority from the local community rather than from Anglo politicians. With the new way of life came new reform for uniting a community." (P:12) An Anglo banker, who had been mayor for 33 years, was replaced by a fifty dollar a week Chicano business agent of the packing house union.

In the 1960's there were also walkouts by Chicano leaders from national

conferences. Two instances were the EOC Conference in Albuquerque in 1966 and the White House Conference on Mexican-American Affairs in El Paso in 1966. (P:24) The walkout with the most local impact was that of the students in the Los Angeles school in the barrio area. Here the students walked out and wore buttons labelled "Chicano Power" and "Viva La Raza". (P:21) An organization of young militant Chicanos played a major role. (P:21)

Probably the most militant of all group is the Alianza Federal de Mercedes, led by Reis Tijerina. It is based on the belief that Chicanos are the rightful owners of the Spanish and Mexican landgrants. Violence and death has occurred in the attempts to secure what Tijerina says rightfully belongs to Chicanos. (P:6)

In summary, the period prior to the 1940's was passive, the 1940's and 1950's saw an awakening, and the 1960's saw a people who used all means necessary to gain what they felt was just. They would settle for nothing less.

It might be noted here that very little of what can be rightfully called research is available. Educational research is practically non-existent.

III

In reviewing the literature and research on this subject it is quite evident that documentation is lacking. Research is practically nil on education or any other subject dealing with Chicano causes.

Periodicals record that which attracts readers. Thus, a walkout, a strike, or violence are recorded for posterity. Cesar Chavez has been able to get his cause in print. Not only have the periodicals been attracted to him because of the grape boycott, but because they discovered that he has what is called "charisma". This always makes a good feature story. (P:23) Focusing attention on this problem has helped bring the plight of the agricultural worker to the general public.

Although this kind of publicity in print serves a purpose, there are the less dramatic but meaningful changes taking place throughout the United States that are lost to documentation. As a result of community action school boards are adopting constructive policies brought about by concerted community efforts. Dr. Y. A. Cabrera makes note of this lack of documentation when he says that virtually no research is available. He further points out that Chicano leaders must accept their share of the blame since they have not contributed to a great deal of literature and research in the past. He concedes, however, that this is changing. (P:4)

There are many important reasons for having the efforts of community action groups recorded.

First, it would call attention to the educational needs of the Chicano. This, says Armando Rodriquez, is a desirable goal. (P:26). The black problem has been conspicuously thrust to the forefront through literature and research, but as Guzman points out, many Americans think the Chicano has no problem. (B:12) Secondly, it would have the effect of urging Chicanos to become active in securing community support for their cause. Chicanos must organize and must make themselves heard, says Alisky, for only Chicano efforts are necessary to effect change. (P:1) Lastly, it would help give direction and guidance to the many existing or potential community action groups. (P:4) There is no need to "pioneer" when much has already been accomplished. It is necessary, however, to make available the important ingredient of how these accomplishments were achieved. The action at Crystal City, Texas did not just happen accidentally. It was a well-organized plan to effect a political change that was overdue. (P:19). The documentation of this momentous event in Texas could have resulted in many "Crystal Cities" throughout the Southwest, in areas where potential Chicano voters outnumber the Anglo.

Thus, the dearth of literature and research on the efforts of Chicanos to effect change is quite evident. Because of the lack of documentation, the problem becomes hidden or obscure, and less impetus and incentive is given to community efforts. Benefits that could result from documenting success or failure is lost. This void in recording important information will not necessarily be a deterrent to the Chicano movement, but it will reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of current efforts.

IV

This study has made many factors quite evident:

1. A need to gather and compile that which is written on the subject.
2. A need to make available literature and research to scholar and layman alike.
3. A need to sponsor and/or engage in needed research projects.
4. A need for funds to implement suitable programs.

In gathering and compiling literature and materials, it will be necessary to collect material that is not found at the traditional sources as well as the tradition.

There is some documentation that is not available through normal research channels. This might include the records and publications of the various Chicano organizations and groups. Many have their own newspapers which could be the source of community-oriented activity. In addition, many produce literature on various phases of their organizational or group acitivities. Another hidden source is the neigborhood newspaper that often calls attention to specific local efforts to further the Chicano cause. This might include the attempts of Chicanos to secure a post on the school board, or community efforts to implement ESL/Bilingual instruction at a local school. Also not readily available are publications of the many federal, state and local governmental agencies. Many studies and surveys have been conducted to determine community needs. Many reports have also been produced in various problem areas about which information is not obtainable. Many valuable masters or doctoral dissertations are gathering dust at the universities,

when reproduction facilities could make available those contacts that are most pertinent.

The traditional materials would also have to be sought and compiled. It must be pointed out that this work must be subsidized. The responsibility must be delegated to a responsible group in order to give coordinated direction and guidance to community efforts.

A need to make this literature and research available leads to the question of location. It would appear that Chicano resource and research centers would have to be established at key sites throughout the United States. The concentration would be in the Southwest, but other areas in the United States should also be included.

What agencies or institutions could possibly carry out this role? They would have to be existing areas that could assume the role, or new resource and research centers established for this specific purpose.

Of the existing institutions, regional research laboratories appear to be logical choices. They have interstate outreach and are specifically engaged in research activities. The question remains as to whether they could or would be willing to assume the added task, if funds were available. Regional OEO centers might also be in a position to handle the situation. Universities and colleges, because of their influence in promoting educational research should also be considered. Decent efforts of these institutions to involve themselves with the indigent community could make this the next logical step. Existing Chicano organizations, whose membership is nationwide, could assume this research role. The GI Forum, The Association of Mexican-American Educators (AMAE), Mexican-American Political

Association (MAPA) are but a few that might qualify. All these groups feel that education is paramount and they would be available to close the research gap.

An entirely new organization could also be set up specifically to handle the Chicano resource and research centers. This might prove more expensive because it might call for new physical facilities. However, in the long run it might prove the most efficient and productive because its sole purpose would be focused on the need as outlined in this paper.

The need to sponsor and foster needed research is vital and urgent. This would mean that the Chicano research and resource center would devote part of its activities to ferreting out research materials for the center. Most important, however, would be that it would serve as the catalyst by which research projects would be carried out in the various communities served by the center. This would include subsidizing research projects or sending research teams to gather and record data for research publication.

The need for funds to carry out this research plan is in itself the most vital phase. Without the necessary financial support, research will still be forthcoming but it will be slow. (P:4) Two sources of finding might be governmental agencies, or private funds from foundations, industries or individuals. Financial support might also determine the nature and character of the research center idea. It might mean that research depositories might be designated from among existing institutions such as libraries, universities, or regional research laboratories. In turn, the research aspect might be centered in one locale that would subsidize research and would send research teams in areas throughout the United States. In short, adjustments might be made, depending on the availability of funds.

V

Literature and research on Chicano community efforts are meager. In the specific area of education it is practically non-existent. The need for this documentation is essential if the problems of the Chicano are to be made known. What is being accomplished and how, is important in giving impetus to community efforts as well as in giving direction through the successes and failures of others.

The study indicates the need for gathering literature and research and making it available. The need for engaging in research projects is imperative. In order to effect this, it might be necessary to utilize existing institutions, or to establish new ones specifically designed to assume this role. Funding would be a key factor in any plan, and governmental as well as private sources should be explored.